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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is an important skill that every student needs in order to be successful. It is directly influenced by how readers construct a representation of the information that they are taking in. Overwhelmingly, the processing strategies found in research can appropriately fit into the Into, Through, Beyond strategies used in the Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) approach. The Into Phase introduces the material to the reader, or group of readers, by creating curiosity for the students to relate to the topic. The purpose of this phase is to explore the subject's content prior to reading in order to expand comprehension of the written text during reading. The "Through" Phase enhances comprehension through several different strategies. One such technique involves a process known as "chunking," the procedure of breaking up reading material into manageable sections. The "Beyond" Phase, by simple definition, are activities which require the student readers to respond to and reflect upon what they have read or what the teacher has read to them. These activities help to improve students' memory for detail as well as their ability to make logical inferences. (Contains 10 references.) (CR)

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Means of Improving Reading Comprehension

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Introduction:

The main purpose of reading is to comprehend, to gain meaning. Reading comprehension is an important skill that every student needs in order to be successful. It is directly influenced by how readers construct a representation of the information that they are taking in. Perfect decoding skills can be easily misleading. Students may read aloud without error, but may be unable to summarize what they have read if they have not learned how to construct meaning as they read. Teaching cognitive strategies to students enables them to acquire reading comprehension skills. Reading is a strategic process which requires students to actively construct meaning from text. Activating one's schema is essential to reading skills (Anino, 1998). In order to be an efficient reader, students be able to relate that which they are reading to their past knowledge and experiences. Interest and purpose in reading is a strong factor in a students ability to construct links between text and self. Overwhelmingly, the processing strategies found in our research can appropriately fit into the Into, Through, Beyond strategies used in the Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE) approach.

Research: The Into, Through, Beyond Approach

The Into Phase

The Into Phase introduces the material to the reader, or group of readers, by creating curiosity for the students to relate to the topic. It is important to locate or develop this curiosity to gain the group's attention (Anino, 1998). The purpose of this phase is to explore the subject's content prior to reading in order to expand comprehension of the written text during reading.

One strategy the teacher should use first is to introduce any new vocabulary words (Success For All, 1997). Have a student guess how a new word is pronounced and/or what it means (Glazer, 1998). Then the teacher pronounces the word correctly and has the group respond chorally. Word meanings are provided and the teacher uses them in meaningful sentences for further understanding.

There are also other preparational strategies used prior to reading to get a student ready for reading the selection (Gunning, 1996). They involve activating prior knowledge regarding a subject, setting purposes and goals, predicting and previewing (Gunning, 1996).

The teacher provides the general topic of the reading to the group and encourages them to activate their prior knowledge, also known as schema, by writing down all they know about that topic. The schema is that body of knowledge and experiences that a student already has about a topic (Gunning, 1996). Using what they already know gives readers confidence in approaching new reading material (Anino, 1998). The teacher asks questions about what the students already know as well as what they would like to know. Consistently repeating this strategy will condition the group to do this on their own.

Students should establish goals and be aware of the overall purposes and goals for their reading. It is important for students to know why they are reading a selection (Success For All, 1997). They may be reading for pleasure, to gain information or to study for a test. Whatever the goal, a different style of reading is required. The teacher should model this process frequently so students gradually complete this on their own (Gunning, 1996).

Predicting is an effective tool to use in activating readers schema or prior knowledge. Predicting helps readers set a purpose for reading. It is a useful way to get students involved with the reading by initiating a search to see whether a prediction is correct. This is an easy strategy that can and should be used even before students learn to read. The teacher would show students the storybook, its cover, title and one or two of the pictures and engage them in predicting what it is about and what will happen, writing the predictions on the board, then reading them aloud.

It is important to create a safe environment for predicting. A unanimous prediction is not necessary. Each student should feel comfortable in making his/her own prediction. However, teachers may want to have students explain their predictions to ensure understanding of the topic. They may learn to be flexible by masking new predictions if their first explanation does not prove valid. Repeated predictions prior to a reading will also condition students to eventually do this on their own.

In previewing students read the title, headings, introduction and summary for a reading and look at illustrations to get an overview of the selection. This is particularly useful prior to reading textbook pieces. This overview familiarizes the students with the text. Information formulated during previewing can be used to make valid predictions and help guide the student during the Through phase.

The Through Phase

Once reading had begun, comprehension can be enhanced through several different strategies. This is considered the Through part of the Into-Through-Beyond approach to instruction. One such technique involves a process known as "chunking", the procedure of breaking up reading material into manageable sections.

Before students read a "chunk", they are given a statement of purpose. This statement guides the reader to look for something specific in the text. Following the reading of each "chunk", students are asked to answer questions relating to the purpose statement. This process is repeated until students complete the passage (Anino, 1998).

"Chunking" is also used in another method of comprehension instruction. Once the students have read a passage, they are told to close their books and pretend they are the teachers. They are to ask questions relating to what they have read. After a while, reverse the roles. Tell the students they are now to answer the questions posed to them. Again, this system is continued for each "chunk" read.

One of the main activities of a third reading comprehension technique involves prediction. This is somewhat different than the prediction used in the Into phase. After the students are given the reading topic they are asked to make a list of predictions, what they think might be in the passage. Then the students read the text and are told to put a mark next to ideas on their list that actually occurred in the reading (Anino, 1998).

A technique known as, Read Cover Recite Check (RCRC), which leads to active reading, can be useful for young students (Archer). Teach the students that the first "R" stands for read. The first "C" is for cover, so that students cover the paragraph with their hand. The next "R" is for recite. Students are to tell themselves what they have read, for instance they might say, in their own words, "This paragraph talked about what one boy

did on his summer vacation." They are to include important details when they recite to themselves. The final "C" stands for check. Students lift their hand, check what they read, and if they have forgotten something important they begin the process again.

Other than simply predicting an outcome of what is read and retelling what has been read, comprehension can be improved through the use of associations and classification. Practicing basic classification of words and ideas can underlie the ability to categorize information read. Once students can categorize individual objects, recognizing a main or topic sentence for a paragraph becomes easier. Associating information already known with new material being read can help the student make sense of a passage (Gunning, 1996).

"Imaging" is a term used to describe the ability to process information read in more than just a verbal way. Making visual images mentally promotes the abilities to make predictions and associations, form conclusions, and to remember what was read. (Gunning, 1996). Reading selections high in the use of sensory vocabulary can help students to use imagery for comprehension. Ask them to imagine how something they have read about would sound, smell, look, feel and/or even taste.

The through techniques mentioned above are some of many methods instructors use to help students understand the passages they read. These systems might be used by students when they are reading for school assignments or for their own pleasure. They can be applied to understating text books or fiction. The techniques noted can be used with young students and modified for more advanced students.

Once passages have been read in their entirety other techniques would be appropriate for the "Beyond" portion of instruction in reading comprehension.

The Beyond Phase

By simple definition, Beyond activities are those which require the students/readers to respond to and reflect upon what they have read or what the teacher has read to them (Anino, 1998). These activities help to improve a student's memory for detail as well as their ability to make logical inferences (Borduin & Borduin, 1994). There are numerous

Beyond activities, allowing for great variety in strategies used, both in activities and how they are carried out (by self, partners, groups, or whole class). These activities enable the readings to be more meaningful to the student as well as more easily understood (SDAIE Class, Summer 1998).

All Beyond activities tap into Gardner's "Seven Intelligences". Students may participate in Beyond activities by working alone - Intrapersonal, or by working with a partner, small group, or the whole class - Interpersonal. Also, these activities can easily incorporate verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical and/or bodily/kinesthetic intelligences.

The "Success for All" workshop (August, 1998) suggested many beyond activities. An example of Verbal/Linguistic activities include: reviewing the reading with a partner, journal writing or making a new ending to the story. These activities require the student to reflect upon their reading and to expand their knowledge of the story. Also, writing their own stories allows students to learn the organizational structure that all stories must have. Retelling the story that they have read to their partner/group/class can demonstrate their comprehension and gives the teacher insight to their reading process (Gunning, 1996). Summarizing a story improves comprehension as well and increases the readers retention of the information. Summarizing can also be a means for the student to monitor their understanding of the text (Gunning, 1996). Paraphrasing strategies also increase the level of comprehension a student gains from reading. For this reason, students need to state the main idea of a passage using original, complete sentences (Katims & Harris, 1997).

Class discussions are an invaluable tool to further a student's retention of a story. Discussion topics should include those that allow the student to identify/discuss the main idea of the story, what they saw as important and discussion is an effective way for the teacher to monitor the class' comprehension abilities (Gunning, 1996). Talking over their reactions to the reading or their answers to the questions, when the student has to give reasons for his/her choices in order to justify their reasoning, helps to clarify their thinking process (Success for All, 1997). This allows for differing perspectives to be expressed to all and allows for active participation.

For logical/mathematical activities, students may be asked to show cause and effect, sequence, compare/contrast, or to use the data to make a prediction of what may happen after a story ends. The students can also look for patterns, order, and the characterization aspects of a story. For musical intelligence, students may choose to create and perform a rap song about their reading, or classical music may be played in the background (Success For All, 1997). Visual/mental images help enable the students to gain detail and inferences, as well as allow for the students to more easily recall details from their reading or listening to a story (Borduin & Borduin, 1994). Spatial activities are numerous and allow for a great deal of variety and creativity among class members. Story maps can be made, as well as a chain map which displays the sequence of details and events in the story, i.e. using dates for biographical and historical accounts

Art is also an invaluable way for students to exemplify what they have read or heard. Some suggestions from "Success For All" were for the students to: make a pop-up story book, create a poster to "sell" the story, design a book jacket, or paint a scene from the story.

For body/kinesthetic activities, students may choose to explain their story by putting on puppet shows, dressing as their favorite character, or acting out a scene from the story (Success for All, 1997). The teacher should always give direct feedback after all activities (Katims & Harris, 1997). Most of these activities cross over in the seven intelligences offering a variety of options for the teacher/student to expand understanding of what they have read. By being creative, students can enjoy the process and learn new ways to express their knowledge. In "It's Elementary", read aloud sessions by a teacher or parent are said to enable the student to better focus on reading for meaning. Parents should be encouraged to read to and with their child, as well as to discuss the stories with them afterwards. Also, connections between what was read and the student's real world experience and prior knowledge should be stressed (Gunning, 1996). Reading a story chorally, allowing for the student to lead after the adult led at the beginning, enables the adult to see the child's skills and improvements as well as what they need help with.

Conclusion

Reading must be practiced in order to maintain and improve reading, decoding and comprehension skills. Practice is essential in and outside of the classroom. Part of being an effective teacher is knowing when to use a particular strategy. It is also important for students to become aware of what works best for them. With such a large variety of activities in which a student may partake, reading can be a fulfilling and enriching experience for all.

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